along with a 13- member delegation including the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Science & Technology. The talks covered a wide range of bilateral issues including FTA negotiations, civil aviation matters, and cooperation in the areas of tourism, science & technology, defence, security, culture and disaster relief. Cooperation in regional forums such as ASEAN and BIMSTEC, and on multilateral issues, was also discussed.

The Thai Prime Minister held talks with the Prime Minister. He also met the Chairperson of the UPA and the Minister for Human Resource Development.

An Educational Exchange Programme covering a wide range of exchange and collaborative activities between the educational institutions of India and Thailand was signed by Shri Arjun Singh, Minister for HRD and the Thai Foreign Minister Dr. Kantathi Suphamongkhon on 3rd June 2005.

Agency to Assist Indians Imprisoned in Foreign Jails

3169. PROF P.J. KURIAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any special agency to track and deal and assist Indians who are being held in various prisons around the world;

(b) if so, the details of this agency;

(c) to what extent this agency has been able to focus on arranging helpful release all over the world during the last three years;

(d) what steps Government propose to strengthen the existing machinery to help Indians in difficult straits all over the world; and

(e) the details of such plans finalized by Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (e) Indian Missions and Posts abroad have standing instructions to immediately take up with the relevant local authorities any case concerning the detention or imprisonment of an Indian national abroad. On receipt of information, our Missions and Posts abroad render every possible assistance within the rules to the detained Indian nationals and try to get them released, if possible. In countries with large concentration of Indian workers (e.g. Gulf), our Missions

and Posts have separate wings exclusively looking after the work of welfare of Indian nationals. Officials of these Wings regularly visit the prisons to find out if there are any detained Indian nationals and to render permissible assistance.

Issuance of Short Time Visas

3170. SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Pakistan High Commission in India is not issuing short time visa for various category applicants as our Indian High Commissioner office is issuing to Pak-Nationals;

(b) whether there was any mutual understanding for issuing such visas usually to various categories; and

(c) whether Government have taken up this matter with Pakistan Government or Pak consulate in Delhi?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir. Government is aware that Pakistan Government has prescribed a period of minimum eight weeks for processing of visas for Indian nationals. The Ministry of External Affairs is also aware that Pakistan High Commission, New Delhi issues far fewer visas than High Commission of India, Islamabad.

(b) and (c) The different categories of visas that can be granted to Indians and Pakistani nationals are provided for under the bilateral Visa Agreement between India and Pakistan signed in September 1974 as modified from time to time. The Agreement provides for different categories of visas which include diplomatic, non-diplomatic and official visas, visitor visas and transit visas. Both the Governments of India and Pakistan have been issuing visas for business purposes, attending conferences, seminars and trade exhibitions, pilgrimages, cultural, academic and sports related matters.

However, the administrative procedures and grant of visas are internal matters of the respective countries.